

### 3

## Compelling Direction

**W**e have arrived at our climbing camp at the base of the Big Horns, ready to attack one of the several peaks stretching across the horizon before us. As we sip our coffee, maps of climb routes laid out before us, our leader poses the Big Question: "All right then, which one shall we go for? Cloud Peak? Bomber Mountain? One of the others? What do you think?" Opinions are ventured, objections raised, and alternatives proposed. By the time we bed down for the night, some members of our team have become more committed to their prior preferences than they were before the discussion. The feelings of others, including the leader, range from frustration to irritation. And we still have not decided which peak we will ascend the next day.

Have you ever spent most of a holiday weekend deciding how the family will spend that weekend? Or come dangerously close to the deadline for a task force report with members still debating the report's purpose? Or switched approaches to a work problem again and again trying to find a way to frame the task that is agreeable to all group members?

We all have experienced such frustrations. They are among the reasons many of us avoid working in groups whenever we can. But it does not have to be that way. See how this feels: "I'm getting a group together for a climb in the Big Horns next weekend. There's a bunch of interesting mountains in that range, but I thought we'd have a go at Cloud Peak. It's a challenging climb and the afternoon weather up there can get real nasty. Probably we'd have only a fifty-fifty chance of making it. But they tell me the view from the summit is just amazing, and at the very least it should be quite a day making the attempt. How about you joining us?"

It's a wholly different experience. This time the leader's direction is clear ("This is the mountain we'll climb"). It is engaging ("It's challenging, we may not make it, but success will be exhilarating"). And it offers choice ("Will you come?"). This invitation is far more likely to energize, orient, and engage team members than is any open-ended discussion about what the group should do. At the risk of offending those of my colleagues who believe that the only way to "empower" teams is full participation by all involved parties until consensus is reached, let me extrapolate from this little example to a bald assertion about self-managing teams in general:

*Effective team self-management is impossible unless someone in authority sets the direction for the team's work.*

The assertion may seem to contradict itself. One is, after all, issuing orders to the very team members who are supposed to manage themselves. Doesn't self-management by a team require consensus decision making about team directions? No, it does not. Those in authority can indeed consult widely with team members and other constituents about alternative aspirations, and draft statements of direction can be circulated, tested, and revised many times. Such consultations and revisions are well advised because they increase the chances of getting the direction right—and they do foster its acceptance by team members. But at some point those who have the legitimate authority for the enterprise must step up to their responsibility and clearly designate the mountain to be climbed.

Who properly sets direction for a team varies from situation to situation. Sometimes it is the team leader, as for our mountain-climbing team. Other times it is someone outside the team, as when a manager appoints a committee to review an organizational issue and make a recommendation for action. And sometimes it is the team itself, as for self-governing groups

such as partnerships and boards of directors. The key is to identify who has the legitimate authority for direction setting and then to make sure that that person or group exercises it competently, convincingly, and without apology. Team performance greatly depends on how well this is done.

## THE MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF GOOD DIRECTION

Authoritatively setting direction about performance aspirations has multiple benefits: It energizes team members, it orients their attention and action, and it engages their talents. These are significant benefits, but, as we will see, the challenge of harvesting them also is significant—far more demanding of leadership skill than making an inspiring speech or posting on the wall a statement of collective vision.<sup>1</sup>

### *Energizes*

John F. Kennedy did not assemble a committee and take a vote back in 1961 when he articulated the goals of the U.S. space program. Instead, he exercised the authority of the presidency by standing before Congress and, with the nation watching on television, declaring that the United States "should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth." Nor did Martin Luther King, Jr., hold a national referendum to determine the aspirations of African Americans for the next stage in the struggle for racial equality in this country. Instead, he exercised his considerable moral authority by standing before his people at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 and delivering the "I Have a Dream" speech—a statement of direction that still inspires those who view it on film.

We all seek purpose and meaning in what we do and how we live. When someone articulates a set of aspirations that elevates our purposes or deepens the meaning we find in our lives, motivational juices flow. That is what Kennedy and King accomplished. Even people who might have chosen other directions for the space program or the civil rights movement found themselves energized by the visions these leaders articulated. Great political and religious leaders are masters at doing this, at creating

and communicating collective aspirations that align and excite others. When leaders' visions do not inspire, however, people quickly turn away from them. In almost every U.S. presidential election, some campaigns falter early in the primary season because the candidates are unable to articulate an engaging vision for the nation.

Establishing a clear and engaging direction is just as important for organizational and team leaders as it is for leaders with broader constituencies. The way David Mathiasen surmounted the considerable leadership challenge he faced as head of the Fiscal Analysis Branch of the U.S. Office of Management and the Budget (OMB) illustrates this point. David's branch had the job of conducting economic analyses of the federal budget for the president's budget director. Ronald Reagan had just defeated Jimmy Carter for the presidency and had appointed David Stockman as budget director. Shortly after the new administration took office, Stockman met with Mathiasen and other senior OMB managers and told them that the agency would proceed immediately to dismantle the Carter budget and replace it with one that expressed the political philosophy of the new president. Achieving this, Stockman told the managers, would require extraordinary commitment by everyone at OMB. He made it clear that he expected nothing less.

How, David wondered, could he engender sufficient commitment among members of his fiscal analysis team? They had worked terribly hard on the Carter budget and had finished up not long ago. Now it was to be unceremoniously discarded. How could he get members fired up to restart a task they had just completed—especially since the Reagan budget was certain to be distasteful to at least some team members? The fiscal analysis team was composed entirely of civil servants rather than political appointees, and their personal politics ranged from strong liberalism to committed conservatism. How much conflict would develop among team members as they worked together to help prepare a conservative federal budget?

David's solution relied mainly on the direction he provided to team members. He was not one to call everybody to a big meeting and make a charismatic speech. Instead, he went around from person to person, from team to team, on no special schedule, making sure that everybody understood what the mission of the fiscal analysis team really was. The essence of what he said on his rounds was this:

As corny as it may sound, what we are here for is to *serve democracy*. We don't make policy, but we make sure that the people who do have available to them absolutely the best information that they can have. Some of you applaud the priorities being set by Reagan and Stockman; others of you are certain that their proposals will lead the country to social and economic disaster.

As a citizen, I too have some opinions about what they are doing. But my personal views don't matter in our work here and neither should yours. We are the only people on this planet who are in a position to provide the president and his director with comprehensive and valid analyses of the likely effects of their policies. The PADs [political associate directors of OMB appointed by the director] can't do it—they don't have the time or the expertise and, besides, they have to keep passing political litmus tests. The director cannot do it himself—although this particular director, if we don't do our job right, is likely to try with who knows what consequences. And the Congressional Budget Office works for that other branch of government; they have a different job to do.

So there's nobody else, it falls on our shoulders. Those of you who love what Reagan is doing can take pleasure from knowing that your analyses will give him the information he needs to implement his policies promptly and decisively. And those of you who detest what he is up to can take pleasure in the fact that, with complete and accurate data, he'll probably do less damage than he would if he didn't have those data, or they were distorted.

No matter what your personal politics, it all comes down to the same thing: Our democracy will work better if the president and the people he appointed to advise him have complete and trustworthy data. Frankly, I don't know whether we can get it all done in the time that we have. It will be quite a stretch. But we're all professionals, so let's pitch in and show them what we can do.

It worked. Even staffers who had unhesitatingly pulled the "Carter" lever in the voting booth found themselves coming in evenings and weekends, when needed, to work with their teams to do their part in rebuilding the national budget. That is the energizing power of good direction.

### Orients

It is Cloud Peak on which all members of our climbing team have their eyes fixed. Once we know which mountain we will climb, we have a collective focus—and we have protected ourselves from that special kind of anarchy that can come when each member of a group or organization heads off in whatever direction is personally most agreeable. Perhaps most important, however, is that our choice of mountain has given us a shared criterion against which to test alternative ways of proceeding. When we get to a fork in the trail, we ask ourselves which branch is more likely to take us toward our objective. There will still be ambiguity, of course. Sometimes the trail that looks as if it goes directly to the base of the mountain actually doesn't. But even under ambiguity a clear and shared sense of purpose helps team members sort among options for how they should proceed. As David Campbell titled his book on career decision making, a personal activity surely as uncertain as even the most ambiguous of team tasks, *If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else*.<sup>2</sup>

For careers, ending up "somewhere else" sometimes turns out to be a happy surprise. The same can be true for task-performing teams. In research and development work, for example, focused teamwork in pursuit of a particular objective sometimes unexpectedly results in an important finding about an entirely different matter—such as when Pfizer scientists who were assessing sildenafil citrate as a possible blood pressure medication serendipitously discovered its efficacy in treating erectile dysfunction and, without having set out to do so, created Viagra.

A good orientation comes to some teams virtually automatically. Members of an athletic team need not have a group discussion before the start of each game to figure out what they are supposed to accomplish. They are there to win—or to come as close to winning as they are able. Nor do members of the systems team at a computer facility have to debate purposes when a server goes down. They are there to get the server back up and on line as quickly as they can. But for many work teams, perhaps most of them, getting agreement among members about which mountain to climb is far from straightforward.

This problem is especially pernicious for management teams whose main work is to organize and oversee work that actually is performed by

others. Management teams always have multiple mountains to climb, most of which are not only legitimate but also important to the long-term well-being of the enterprise. Moreover, such teams regularly have to deal with their equivalent of a server crash: acute problems that appear to require action both immediate and well considered. How can such teams establish and maintain an orientation that helps members to choose wisely among the multiple options that invariably are open to them?

Some management teams solve the orientation problem by focusing exclusively on but a single aspiration, such as "maximizing shareholder value." This choice may help keep members' anxieties low and even guide them in charting a reasonable course through uncertain waters. But there always are multiple paths that could be followed to achieve any one overriding aspiration, and it may be far from clear which path has the greatest chance of success. Something more concrete is needed, something that is more useful to teams in their day-to-day decision making.

This was the challenge faced by Don Burr, the founder of People Express Airlines, early in the life of his company. Burr aspired to create an organization that engaged a far greater proportion of members' talents and energy than was, at the time, typical of other airlines. People Express employees, all of whom would be called managers and treated as such, would have to make decisions and judgment calls continuously in their day-to-day work—regardless of whether they were flying aircraft, taking reservations, or paying bills. Burr recognized that they would need some kind of template to use in their decision making and, moreover, that any global vision statement would be too general to be of much practical use to them.

His solution was to convene the officers of the company months before operations began and ask them to generate a list of the main precepts that everyone in the company, from himself to the newest employee, should consider as they made choices about how to proceed with their work. After extensive discussion, the officers settled on the six precepts listed in chapter 1 (service, commitment to the growth of the individual; best provider of air transportation; highest quality of management; role model; simplicity; maximization of profits). Everyone was intensively and repeatedly trained in the meaning and application of those precepts, and people did internalize and rely heavily on them in making decisions under uncertainty—such as when a team of gate agents had to decide what to do

with a planeload of customers whose flight, the last one of the day, had just been canceled. Precisely because there was no single aspiration that drove all decisions at the company, teams of managers at People Express had to be thinking all the time about how to decide among alternative courses of action. Even when the precepts seemed to be in conflict with one another, a not uncommon occurrence, the proper way to proceed often became apparent after a few minutes of discussion. The precepts were a reasonably concrete implementation of collective direction that provided a tool that teams at the company could actually use in developing or selecting appropriate task performance strategies—and in revising them when circumstances changed.<sup>3</sup>

Business organizations such as People Express are subject to the economic discipline of the market, which can help focus team direction setting even for management teams whose work may be less clearly defined than that of front-line teams. Setting an orienting direction can be tougher in public and nonprofit organizations, especially those that have lofty but abstract aspirations and values. As we have seen, David Mathiasen was able to make a highly abstract value ("to serve democracy") meaningful and operational for his OMB teams. Direction setting was considerably more problematic at a small cooperative newspaper I once visited. The newspaper had two main aspirations: to serve its community by providing information and perspectives not available in the mainstream press, and to provide meaningful work experiences for its members. The problem came as members of the cooperative, all of whom were personally committed to the ethic of democracy and to full participation by everyone at the paper, strove to operationalize those aspirations. What kind of information and perspectives were to be provided, and to whom? Just what was meant by meaningful work? Were all to share equally in all the work activities involved in running a newspaper, or were certain individuals to have more interesting or fulfilling work than others? Despite the considerable time and energy expended debating issues such as these, co-op members did not succeed in affirming a collective direction that was concrete enough to guide their work behavior. And, partly for this reason, the newspaper never was able to get itself established as a viable alternative source of news and employment in its community.

Good direction orients team members and thereby provides them a

template they can use to assess options for how they might proceed with their work—that is, with their task performance strategies. If the work itself does not automatically provide a clear orientation, as it did for the athletic and computer teams mentioned earlier, it is incumbent upon those who have leadership responsibilities to create something that does. To let a team keep on keeping on without a clear sense of where it is going deprives members of the clarity they need to manage themselves efficiently and well. It invites endless discussions and debates about the team's main purpose, such as those I observed at the cooperative newspaper, that divert member time and energy from the team's real work. And, over the longer term, it can engender the kind of personal disillusionment and collective incapacitation that comes when well-intended exchanges among well-meaning people serve mainly to bring to the surface and highlight the things about which they disagree.

### *Engages*

It's our team's big game, the one for the championship. It's the day the visiting committee comes to review and, we hope, approve our new curriculum. It's the meeting at which we make our final pitch for the million-dollar contract. It's our one chance to convince the Senate subcommittee of the merits of the bill we support. In all of these cases, our team's purposes are highly consequential. And, in all of them, there is no question about who we ask to act for the team: We put forward our most competent members, and they, buoyed by our support, give their all to accomplish the team's purposes.

It is instructive to notice how differently member talent is used by professional athletic teams, college teams, Little League teams, and teams in pickup games played over the lunch hour at work.<sup>4</sup> The first-listed teams are likely to rely as heavily as possible on their very best players. If the outcome of the game is important enough, second-tier members really do sit willingly on the bench for the good of the team. The ethic for pickup games is the opposite, since the final score is of no consequence to anybody and the main aspiration is for everybody to get some exercise and have some fun. Little League games, of course, are supposed to be more like the latter than the former, providing opportunities for kids to



play and learn and have a good time—although sometimes, driven by coaches or parents who do not understand that, they wind up operating as if they were professional teams whose win-loss record actually counts for something.

When the work is important, we use all of the knowledge, skill, and experience we can marshal. We hold nothing in reserve. We defer until less consequential times putting our newer or less competent members on the front line to give them developmental experience. And we temporarily set aside any team norms that give all members the same amount of say about the team product or equal time on the court or at the lectern. Yes, we all contributed a great deal in doing the analyses and interpretations for our task force report. But now it is time to present our findings and recommendations to the mayor, and we only have twenty minutes. Do each of the four of us take five minutes to present one part of the report? Or do we ask the one member who has the best presentation skills to give the report on behalf of the team, with the rest of us present and prepared to answer any questions the mayor may have? If the issue we are addressing is important enough, we just may face up to our differences in presentation skills and subordinate our individual needs for prominence to our overriding objective of getting the mayor to consider seriously what we have to propose.

Making within-group distinctions generates strong feelings among members. As a high school basketball player, I was taller than I was good. But at one tournament game it seemed I couldn't miss—virtually anything I tossed at the basket went in. The game was a cliffhanger: We were one point down and had the ball out of bounds with just seconds to play. Coach Hillman told us what to do: "Get the ball in, and then loft it to the big guy on the baseline. Richard, catch the ball and shoot it." Nobody had ever said that to me before. I glowed. Decades later, I was playing bass trombone in a community orchestra. The opening bars of one piece we were preparing included a moderately difficult and frighteningly exposed solo line for my instrument. I practiced and practiced those few bars and thought I had them in pretty good shape. Then, during one of our rehearsals, the conductor turned to the superb tuba player who sat just to my left and said, "Sam, why don't you double with the bass trombone on that passage?" I shriveled up in my seat.

Those were small matters, but my feelings were surprisingly strong. That is what happens when people get feedback from their teammates,

even indirectly, about their competence. Precisely because feelings run so high when members' talents are at issue, teams often turn to the leader—the coach or conductor or chairperson—to handle such matters on the team's behalf. Only the most mature self-managing teams are consistently able to manage differences among members frontally and competently, resisting the temptation either to off-load that responsibility to the team leader or to resort to subterfuge to get the right people in place while still "protecting the feelings" of those whose offerings are declined.

The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, which is one of the finest ensembles of its kind in the world, deals with differences in members' expertise about as well as I have seen it done. The option of off-loading the issue to the conductor is not open to this orchestra for a very good reason: It doesn't have one. There is nobody other than the members themselves to decide how to weight the diversity of ideas and opinions that invariably flood the hall when a piece of music is being rehearsed. Because orchestra members have played together regularly over the years, they know one another's special strengths and weaknesses extremely well, and they are not reticent about using that knowledge in an open, matter-of-fact way. Members listen especially intently to what certain of their colleagues have to say when a Mozart piano concerto is being prepared, but to others when the piece is a Rossini overture, and to still others when it is new music by a contemporary composer. Because Orpheus players share a commitment to perform at the highest possible level, each of their concerts and recordings is for them highly consequential. That fact, coupled with their deep knowledge of their colleagues' musical tastes and strengths, has resulted in an ensemble that wastes very little of its members' knowledge, skill, and experience.<sup>5</sup>

Great direction fully engages team members' talents. It is not just that members work harder when what they are doing is important. It is more than that—it is that they pursue collective purposes using every scrap of knowledge, skill, and experience that the team can scoop up. When a team has consequential purposes, one rarely sees some members smugly watching while others struggle to get their tasks done right. What one sees instead is each member doing those parts of the work that he or she can do best, and, on occasion, one sees more talented or experienced members reaching out to assist and teach those of their colleagues who are still learning.

### Words Are Not Enough

Good direction has multiple benefits that significantly increase the likelihood that a work team will perform effectively. Compelling direction is *challenging*, which energizes team members and generates strong collective motivation to perform well. It is *clear*, which orients members toward their common purpose and thereby facilitates their developing and using work strategies that are fully appropriate for accomplishing that purpose. And it is *consequential*, which engages the talents of members and encourages the team to identify and use well the full complement of members' knowledge and skills.

As is seen in table 3-1, each of the three attributes serves a special function and brings a certain kind of benefit to a work team. Moreover, each attribute can reinforce the benefits of the other two, as when a challenging purpose engages members' talents in addition to heightening their motivation, or when clarity of purpose provides an energizing focus for members' motivation as well as a tool that helps them develop and execute appropriate task performance strategies. It is the constellation of the three attributes of compelling direction that brings the greatest benefits to a task-performing team.

To harvest the benefits of compelling direction, a team's purposes actually have to *be* challenging, clear, and consequential. Words alone do not suffice, not even if they are inspiring words personally delivered to the team by a charismatic leader. It can be tempting to use rhetorical devices to try to make a team's direction seem more compelling than it really is, as in the old story about the crew leader who motivated his brick carriers by

TABLE 3 - 1

#### The Functions and Benefits of Good Direction

Attributes of Good Direction	Functions	Benefits
Challenging	Energizes	Enhances motivation
Clear	Orients	Aligns performance strategy with purposes
Consequential	Engages	Fosters full utilization of knowledge and skill

convincing them that they actually were building a cathedral. If such devices work at all, their effect is temporary because it becomes clear soon enough that what one *really* is doing, day after day, is carrying bricks. It is impossible to articulate team purposes that energize, orient, and engage members for work that is essentially trivial.

### DIRECTION ABOUT WHAT?

Having a compelling direction is a key condition for team effectiveness, but just what should be specified when direction is set? Should direction be mainly or only about the team's ultimate purposes, or should it also include some specification of the means the team is supposed to use in pursuing those purposes? Or, perhaps, should direction be mainly about means, on the assumption that if a team proceeds with its work in the right way, good outcomes are almost sure to emerge?

The answer to these questions is shown in figure 3-1. To foster self-managing, goal-directed work, those who create work teams should be insistent and unapologetic about exercising their authority to specify end states, but equally insistent about *not* specifying the details of the means by which the team is to pursue those ends—the upper-right quadrant in

FIGURE 3 - 1

#### Setting Direction about Means versus Ends

		Specify Ends?	
		No	Yes
Specify Means?	No	Anarchy	Self-Managed, Goal-Directed Work
	Yes	Turn-off (Worst of All)	Wasted Human Resources

the figure.<sup>6</sup> As we will see, to be in any of the other three quadrants is to invite significant performance problems or substantial underutilization of the team's resources.

### *Ends but Not Means*

The way David Mathiasen set direction for the OMB budget analysis team (described earlier in this chapter) placed the team squarely in the upper-right quadrant. He insistently exercised his authority in articulating the team's main purposes, but refrained from specifying the details of the analytic methods members were to use in achieving those purposes. Team members were, after all, trained and highly professional economists, people who surely knew more about state-of-the-art techniques of economic analysis than did Mathiasen himself. Many, if not most, effective self-managing teams in industry also turn out to fall in the same quadrant.<sup>7</sup>

When ends are specified but means are not, team members are able to—indeed, are implicitly encouraged to—draw on their full complement of knowledge, skill, and experience in devising and executing a way of operating that is well tuned to the team's purposes and circumstances.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as members work together to develop a good performance strategy, they necessarily will have to revisit their overall objectives. "No, that wouldn't work," a member may assert, "because it wouldn't give us close enough tolerances." "But we don't really *need* that level of precision in this particular subassembly," another may respond. In the discussion that ensues, members review, refine, and deepen their understanding of their collective purposes, of the ends that they are to achieve, and thereby lessen the chances that they will head off in a direction that may have seemed right at first but that actually is not what is needed.

The kind of mindful processing that characterizes teams in the upper-right quadrant benefits almost any task-performing team but is especially important for teams whose work demands high reliability, such as operating teams at nuclear power plants, aircraft flight deck crews, and surgical teams in hospitals. Mindful processing also increases the probability (but of course does not guarantee) that a team will come up with an idea or a solution that is genuinely creative, one that could never have been programmed ahead of time and, indeed, that may not even have occurred to those who created the team and set its initial direction.<sup>9</sup>

To specify ends but not means is a more demanding leadership responsibility than merely articulating a compelling purpose for a team and then walking away, leaving members entirely on their own to try to achieve that purpose. As subsequent chapters will show, there is much that leaders can and should do to support the team along the way, including providing an enabling structure for the team (chapter 4), ensuring that organizational systems and practices support the team in its work (chapter 5), and providing well-targeted and well-timed coaching interventions (chapter 6).

Analytic teams in Total Quality Management (TQM) programs illustrate the importance of supplementing compelling direction with an enabling structure, a supportive context, and competent coaching. Under TQM, cross-functional teams undertake research projects to develop or identify "best" work practices, those that bring work processes under the greatest possible control. Although it is left up to the teams how best to accomplish this, members are trained in good analytic techniques and are provided with a diverse set of tools to use in identifying or developing improved and simplified work practices. The tools, and the training that organizations provide teams in how to use them well, significantly increase analytic teams' prospects of success.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond tools and training, it usually is advisable for managers to clearly specify the outer limits of a team's discretion, thereby lessening the risk that members' enthusiasm for achieving their collective purpose will result in their taking actions that are organizationally unacceptable or ethically questionable. The overall charge to in-flight customer service teams at the domestic airline described in chapter 1 was to do anything and everything possible to provide such a good in-flight experience that customers would clamor to fly the airline again. This global direction was operationalized in terms of the Three C's (complete, clean, communicate) that every member of the in-flight staff had committed to memory. However, management also placed explicit limitations on crews' latitude in deciding how to achieve that overall purpose by requiring that they follow prescribed safety regulations and practices without fail and that they refrain from giving away liquor to please or pacify passengers. Customer service teams at that airline enjoyed an expansive playing field on which were scattered many potentially useful tools and resources, but it was a clearly bounded field. That is as it should be, even for teams in the upper-right quadrant who have wide latitude for deciding how to go about achieving their prescribed purposes.



### *Both Ends and Means*

When work is especially important—for example, if errors have the potential for catastrophic consequences—the upper-right quadrant is where you want to be. Teams in that quadrant are able to respond immediately and flexibly to unexpected problems, information, or opportunities. They don't have to follow to the letter detailed rules of procedure or hope that prescribed processes make adequate provision for any surprises that occur along the way. It is ironic, therefore, that managers of teams that perform highly important work often drift down toward the lower-right quadrant, specifying both teams' main purposes *and* the details of the means by which those purposes are to be achieved. Such teams have more in common with a professional symphony orchestra, whose members' responsibilities do not extend beyond playing well what the score and the conductor dictate, than with a self-managing string quartet whose members have broad latitude for deciding both what and how they will play. They are like a football team whose coach has so little confidence in the team's player-leaders that each and every play is sent in from the sidelines.

Teams in the lower-right quadrant can perform superbly, of course, but when they do it has more to do with the quality of the strategy dictated by the leader, coupled with his or her skill in motivating members to do exactly what they are told, than with the capabilities or potential of the team itself. To specify in detail the means as well as the ends does consolidate a leader's control of the team, which can keep that person's anxieties within a comfortable range. But the leader's personal comfort is obtained at considerable cost in wasted human resources—not harnessing the full array of members' talents and experience, eliminating the possibility of on-the-spot team improvisations that sometimes spell the difference between disaster and triumph, and running the risk that members will become more invested in asserting control over their activities than in accomplishing well the team's main purposes.<sup>11</sup>

TQM teams again are instructive. As noted above, cross-functional analytic teams that scrutinize work processes and recommend ways to streamline and simplify them generally have direction that is explicit about purposes but that also provides members with considerable latitude to figure out how best to carry out the analytic work. Once improved work practices are identified and documented, however, they are standardized

and diffused throughout the organization. The front-line teams that actually use them may wind up with sharply reduced discretion for managing their own work. The potential for overspecification of work procedures under TQM is so great that one is reminded of industrial engineering during the heyday of scientific management, when it was the job of process designers to identify the "one best way" to perform the work and the job of front-line producers to do the work precisely that way.<sup>12</sup> As noted in chapter 2, the costs of this approach are well documented, both in the quality of the work produced but also in the underutilization of an organization's human resources.

Airline flight deck crews, surprisingly, sometimes fall victim to the dysfunctions of the lower-right quadrant of figure 3-1. Until relatively recently, crews of commercial aircraft were fully in charge of their flights, doing whatever they needed to do to get the aircraft to its destination safely, economically, and (if possible) comfortably. Crews were assisted in their work by increasingly sophisticated technological and informational aids. The role of the crew changed, however, with the advent of what are called "glass cockpit" aircraft (the name reflecting the fact that data used by crews are processed digitally and presented on computer-like screens). Formerly, the technology served the crew, who flew the aircraft. Now, in state-of-the-art aircraft, the crew programs the technology, the technology actually flies the aircraft, and crew members monitor to make sure that everything is going well. Some contemporary fly-by-wire aircraft, in which pilot commands are transmitted digitally (by wire) rather than hydraulically or mechanically, even are programmed so that pilots are literally unable to exceed parameters, such as angle of bank, that have been predetermined by designers. Although with the best of intentions, designers and managers have significantly restricted the latitude of crews to manage their own flights.<sup>13</sup>

The increasing sophistication of cockpit technology has been accompanied by increased standardization of cockpit procedures—driven in part by the technological imperatives but also by new policies and practices put in place by airline managers and regulators to increase the safety of flight. Although standardization unquestionably has enhanced safety, we may now be starting to see some unanticipated negative effects of a very good idea. Consider, for example, what happens after an aircraft accident or serious incident. The National Transportation Safety Board invariably identifies one or more proximal causes of the event and recommends

changes to minimize the likelihood of the same thing happening again. This often involves introducing a technological safeguard (such as a warning signal or a guard on a switch), a new component of initial or recurrent training, or an additional procedure that crews subsequently are required to follow. Each of these actions by itself invariably is a good idea. But no one ever examines their *collective* impact on crews and their work.

All the well-intentioned additions to procedure manuals, together with all the automated devices that have been introduced into cockpits and all the management directives intended to promote efficiency or passenger service, may be having what policy analysts call *perverse effects*. Public programs to reduce poverty, for example, sometimes can unintentionally encapsulate poor people in a state of poverty rather than help them work their way out of it.<sup>14</sup> It certainly is true that too much latitude for flight crews can result in a poorly disciplined cockpit in which members are unable to predict who is going to take what action next. But it also is true that too much standardization, even in the interest of safety, sometimes can perversely result in crews monitoring systems and executing procedures less attentively and deliberately than would be ideal—especially when, as usually is the case, the flight is routine and everything seems to be proceeding normally.

When a good balance is achieved between standardization and autonomy, all crew members tend to be alert and proactive in managing the aircraft and its systems. And the likelihood increases that, when extraordinary teamwork is in fact required—that is, in circumstances when standard procedures are inadequate—the crew will be both ready and able to work through the difficulties to a successful outcome. It is a significant leadership challenge to achieve balance between laissez-faire management that can invite chaos and relentless standardization that erodes leaders' ability to develop and lead their teams. Team leaders, whether their teams are operating at 30,000 feet or in an office or a plant on terra firma, need from their managements a clear and engaging statement of direction—but also sufficient latitude to take the actions that are needed to meet those expectations and confident knowledge of the outer-bound limits on their authority.

### *Neither Ends nor Means*

The late 1960s was a time of student unrest in the United States, when even professorial authority was suspect. Bill Torbert (then a doctoral student and

now a professor at Boston College) and I were slated to teach an undergraduate course on the psychology of administration at Yale University, and we were worried. How, we wondered, could we get the students involved in what we viewed as some fascinating intellectual material when there probably would be even more fascinating things, such as student protests, happening outside the classroom? Our strategy, consistent with our own values as well as with the times, was to develop a pedagogy in which we would use what went on in the class, our collective process, as a vehicle for exploring the substantive course content. The main learning would take place in small work groups of about eight members, which would devise innovative and engaging ways of exchanging with each other what they learned about their topics. One member of each group would serve on a course-wide steering committee that would work with Bill and me to monitor and fine-tune the course as the semester progressed. Once the course developed some momentum, we would serve mainly as resources for the students, using our expertise, experience, and contacts to help the work groups locate whatever they needed to pursue their learning projects. The students, we felt, could and should have as much say as we did about what would be covered, how it would be taught, and how their performance would be assessed.<sup>15</sup>

On the first day of class, we described the topics that generally are covered in a course on the psychology of administration, retraced in conversation the development of our ideas for the course, and finished up by saying, in essence, "This is where we are right now. Would you like to join us?" Almost everyone did, eagerly and vigorously. Course enrollment jumped substantially as word got around about what we were doing. At last, more than one student told us, some professors had gotten it right, had figured out how to provide genuinely student-directed education. We felt like heroes.

The last session of the course was held in my office rather than the classroom. Present were Bill, me, and a handful of our most ideologically committed students. Most of the others had either dropped the course or psychologically disengaged from it. Although students reported that they had not learned much about the psychology of administration that term, a number of them reported they had gained some unsettling insights about themselves. One wrote that he felt so guilty about not working in the course that "I even tried to do a little independent reading. I failed miserably. Thus, everything seems to point to the fact that I

had deluded myself about my motivation." Another said, "I am bitterly disappointed because what happened has been so much less than what I told myself I was going to do that I feel I have not lived up to my promise. . . . How much less chance, I find myself feeling, is there for a liberal philosophy hoping to have an effect on the events of the world or on the U.S. government."

These students were too hard on themselves. In fact, Bill and I had failed to provide the work groups, which were the central pedagogical device of the course, with direction about *either* the ends they were to seek or the means they were to use in carrying out their educational work. As one student wrote in his end-of-course assessment, "The groups were [too much] on their own. Because of the aimlessness of the group, I found I had nowhere to channel my desire to do work in the field. As a result, my enthusiasm dissipated in this vacuum."

Although the spirit of the late 1960s is long gone, the dynamic that occurred in our course continues to be seen in contemporary organizations. Sometimes the responsibility for insufficient direction lies with managers who believe, as Bill and I did, that "empowerment" can best be achieved (or can only be achieved) when teams are given complete autonomy for deciding both what they will do and how they will do it. Other times, especially for teams and organizations with strong egalitarian values, members may be so committed to obtaining agreement about collective purposes and processes that they talk and talk but never settle on what they are going to do. Or, perhaps, members eventually do decide on something but it is so bland and innocuous that no member could possibly be offended—or engaged. In all of these cases, the failure to establish a compelling direction runs two significant risks: that team members will pursue whatever purposes they personally prefer, but without any common focus; or that they gradually will fade into the woodwork, as did so many of the students in our psychology course.<sup>16</sup>

### *Means but Not Ends*

The only thing worse than failing to specify either ends or means is to dictate the latter, the procedures to be followed, without providing any sense of the former, the overall purposes of the work. The lower-left cell of the matrix in figure 3-1 is unquestionably the worst of the four quadrants, as

illustrated by the following story told by George Seegers, who at the time was a vice president at Citibank responsible for stock transfer operations:

When I first came to the bank, I wanted to find out what all the people did in my department. The first person I came to was an elderly lady, and I sat down next to her, and I said "What do you do?" And she said, "I do the yellows." I said, "Well, what is that?" And she said, "Well, it's the yellows. I take this yellow piece of paper and I stamp it and I put it over here." I said, "But what is it? What happens? What are the yellows?" I was an assistant vice president at the time, which is still a respectable officer here in the bank, and she looked at me and she said, "Excuse me, sir, but are you stupid? This is a yellow. I take the yellow piece of paper and I stamp it and I put it over here. It's the yellows. That's what it is." That lady had no idea what part that played in what we are doing.<sup>17</sup>

George, who eventually succeeded in reorganizing and reenergizing the stock transfer department of his bank, had his work cut out for him. His predecessors had set up the stock transfer operation as an assembly line that processed paper, with each step of the process simplified and routinized to the greatest extent possible. One floor in the bank building, he reported, was occupied by workers who did nothing but open envelopes. They passed the envelopes on to workers on the next floor who extracted the contents, and so on down the line. In theory, a paper-processing assembly line can operate smoothly and well—but only if everything works exactly as it is supposed to. In George's bank, it often did not. Worse, glitches could not be corrected on the spot because each group of workers had neither comprehension of the overall purpose of what they were doing nor the latitude to alter their prespecified work procedures.

The management strategy of George's predecessors invited both managers and group members to focus so intently on procedures that their collective purpose, the real reason they were there, dropped from awareness. When that happens, one generally sees teams at their worst: Their products or services do not satisfy those who receive them, team capabilities atrophy or erode over time, and individual members do not find in their team experiences either professional learning or personal growth (recall the team effectiveness criteria discussed in chapter 1).

The lower-left quadrant of figure 3-1 (means specified, but not ends)

is the opposite of the upper-right quadrant (ends specified, but not means). The dynamics of teams that occupy these two cells differ as sharply as do the cells' defining attributes. Clear purposes with plenty of latitude to decide how to pursue them is the recipe for empowerment; the opposite, as we have seen, is a recipe for collective failure.

### *Walking the Authority Balance Beam*

Setting direction for a team always involves the exercise of authority. For that reason, direction setting is an inherently anxiety-arousing activity. When a leader exercises authority, team members are likely to react in one of two ways: They may view the leader as an omniscient figure on whom they can depend or as an overcontrolling person who must somehow be repelled, subverted, or replaced. Worse, groups sometimes initially adopt the first view and then move to the second when they discover, as inevitably they will, that the leader actually is flawed and imperfect.<sup>18</sup>

Such dynamics are especially likely when the leaders balance, as I have argued they should, between assigning a team authority for some parts of the work and withholding it for others. To minimize anxieties and discomfort in such circumstances, managers and team members may collude to "clarify" who is really in charge of the work. Sometimes the result is the assignment of virtually all authority to the team—which, as we have seen, can result in anarchy or in a team heading off in an inappropriate direction. Other times, as in the lower-right quadrant of figure 3-1, managers retain all authority for themselves, dictating work procedures in detail to team members and in the process losing many of the advantages that can accrue from teamwork. To create and maintain an appropriate partitioning of authority between managers and teams requires that anxieties be managed rather than minimized and that people be willing and able to live with (and sometimes even temporarily increase) uncertainties and ambiguities as they seek to create a work system that works.

Few leadership choices are more consequential for the long-term well-being of teams than those that address the partitioning of authority between managers and teams. It takes skill to accomplish this well, and it is a skill that has emotional and behavioral as well as cognitive components (see chapter 7). Just knowing the rules for partitioning authority is

insufficient; one also needs some practice in applying those rules in situations where anxieties, including one's own, are high. The management of authority relations with task-performing groups is much like walking a balance beam, and it takes a good measure of knowledge, emotional maturity, and perseverance to keep from falling off.

### TRADE-OFFS IN SETTING DIRECTION

Even leaders who are intently focused on providing teams with both compelling purposes and wide latitude about means have many options for *how* they do that. Among the many trade-offs leaders must manage in setting good direction are those having to do with (1) how clear and complete to be in specifying purposes, (2) how challenging performance targets should be, and (3) how best to align the direction of one's own teams with broader organizational purposes.

#### *Clarity versus Incompleteness*

Good direction for a task-performing team is clear—but also incomplete. Direction that is unclear or highly abstract can waste members' time and embroil them in needless conflicts as they try to figure out what it is that they are really supposed to do. Direction that is *too* clear and complete, on the other hand, can lessen members' commitment to the work and sometimes prompt unwanted and even unethical behaviors. The challenge for those who set direction for teams is to balance between giving the team too little and too much guidance about what is to be accomplished.

Here is a statement of direction that I copied from an attractive poster on the wall of an employee cafeteria (I have changed it very slightly to disguise the company):

Our mission is to provide quality products and services that meet the needs of individuals and businesses, allowing us to prosper and provide a fair return to our stockholders.

Another company stated its mission simply as "to create value." It is, perhaps, understandable that organization-wide mission statements such as



these are abstract and general. Like the platforms of political parties, they invariably are the result of much debate and many compromises as leaders struggle to erect a tent under which everyone can comfortably sit. But, also like political platforms, abstract statements of direction are subsequently ignored by just about everyone, including those who helped write them.<sup>19</sup>

Statements of direction for work teams often have the same problem as those of corporations and political parties, and sometimes for the same reason: High-sounding language covers many compromises. More often, however, the direction given work teams is vague or ambiguous simply because nobody has taken the trouble to think hard about group purposes. "Why don't you get some people together and look into that?" the senior manager asks. Or, "I'd like you people to figure out how we can cut some significant costs out of our operations." Or, very popular these days, "Do what you need to do to satisfy your customers."

To energize teams, there needs to be some clarity, some bite, some specificity. David Mathiasen at the Office of Management and the Budget did not sit around with his lieutenants and generate an abstract vision statement for his teams. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, he did indeed underline the overriding purpose of the work ("to serve democracy"), but he followed that up by explaining what those high-sounding words actually meant operationally—that is, to complete the analyses required for the new budget by the deadline the director had set, and to make sure that the analytic products were trustworthy, informative, and uncolored by the personal political views of those who prepared them.

But David did not go too far. He left enough room for people to project their *own* meanings and interpretations into the overall direction he had set. That, too, is necessary to energize team members.<sup>20</sup> When a leader specifies every detail of what is to be accomplished, team members understandably may view the group's purposes as the leader's rather than as their own. They have little room to add their own shades of meaning to those purposes or to develop their own collective interpretation of what they are supposed to do. Collective sense-making is a natural and essential process that occurs when a team is coming to "own" a piece of work, and an overly explicit statement of direction can preempt that process.<sup>21</sup>

The problem with overly complete direction runs even deeper in situations in which there is but a single primary objective. There are few motivational devices more potent than having a challenging, specific performance

objective.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, well-specified objectives also can induce unintended and unwanted consequences if they are too specific or if teams become excessively focused on them. One manager of field service at Xerox, for example, specified that field service teams should, without exception, appear on customers' premises no later than four hours after a service call was received. Teams accepted and generally met this challenging objective. In doing so, however, they lost the flexibility to respond differently to different kinds of calls—for example, dealing immediately with an urgent problem but merely letting a customer with a nonessential service request know that the problem had been logged and would be taken care of in a day or two. It would have been better for the manager to specify a more global objective for customer service and leave it to the teams to balance among considerations of response speed, cost, and quality in figuring out how best to achieve it.<sup>23</sup>

The downside risks of completely specifying challenging performance objectives are especially great when highly significant rewards (or punishments) are contingent upon their achievement, because they tempt performers to compromise their normal ethical standards.<sup>24</sup> During the Vietnam conflict in the early 1970s, for example, overall military objectives were operationalized, in part, by body counts. Field commanders were required regularly to report the number of enemy dead, and it was made clear to them that big numbers were what was wanted. So big numbers were what got reported back to Washington, where policy makers based strategy decisions on data that at best were unreliable and that occasionally were entirely imaginary.<sup>25</sup> The same kind of thing occasionally is seen in sales organizations when managers set and powerfully reward specific, challenging sales objectives. The temptation to do whatever has to be done to meet the target, even if that involves misleading customers or fudging data, can be hard to resist. Although it always is appropriate to fault those who lie, cheat, or steal to achieve performance targets, responsibility for such ethical lapses must be shared by managers who use the power of challenging direction in ways that invite these lapses.

Good direction statements have both specificity *and* a little fuzz around the edges. Scientists call the fuzz *surplus meaning* and try to avoid it when defining concepts in their research. Great leaders, by contrast, embrace and exploit surplus meaning—both because it helps energize members and because it lessens the likelihood that teams will fall victim to the



pathologies that sometimes are elicited by highly specific performance objectives that have substantial rewards attached.

Great leaders use a variety of tools to balance between clarity and completeness on the one hand and ambiguity and generality on the other. One such tool is language.<sup>26</sup> Leaders' words about team direction are always just a bit ambiguous. They are more likely to use stories and examples to illustrate what they mean than to set specific quantitative targets. And they use lots of analogies and metaphors to triangulate what they are after. These linguistic and narrative devices invite team members to project their own interpretations onto what is being said, and thereby enrich the meaning that members find in the work. Even more important, however, is that members develop rich and detailed images of the end states that the team is to pursue. It is images of end states, far more than any other way of representing performance targets, that engage and focus team members' motivation to perform.<sup>27</sup>

Another strategy that some leaders use to balance between clarity and incompleteness is to supplement statements about the team's overriding objective with explicit discussion of the multiple and sometimes conflicting second-level objectives that contribute to its achievement. One airline in our research program accomplished this in a way that surprised pilots who had just been promoted to captain. At their upgrade seminar, a senior manager welcomed the new captains to the "partnership" at the airline and congratulated them on their accomplishments. Then the head of flight operations took the podium to describe what was expected of them in their new role. Their main job, he said, was to maximize simultaneously three outcomes: safety, efficiency, and passenger comfort and service. All three aspirations struck the new captains as worthy and appropriate, and many of them began to nod in agreement. Then, gradually, furrows began to appear on brows as captains realized that they were being asked to do the impossible. No crew can simultaneously maximize safety *and* efficiency *and* passenger comfort. Instead, a crew must constantly make trade-offs among these three aspirations as they carry out their flying duties. And that, of course, was the point the manager wanted to make. To promote the overall well-being of the airline, its employees, and its customers, captains must understand the critical importance of all three aspirations, accept the fact that trade-offs must be made among them, and expertly mobilize their teams to manage those trade-offs well in real time.<sup>28</sup>

The direction that the captains were given, like that which David Mathiasen gave his teams of economic analysts, was simultaneously clear *and* incomplete. Teams whose direction is clear but incomplete can neither profess ignorance of what they are supposed to accomplish nor escape the challenge of online self-management by focusing exclusively on any single outcome.

### *Modest versus Challenging Aspirations*

Let me invite you to play an imaginary game of darts. Mounted on one wall of an otherwise empty room is the target with a red bull's eye about four inches in diameter. I give you ten darts and tell you that your task is to get as many of them in the bull's eye as you can. Then I stand aside to watch and record your score. Your initial act, most likely, will be to ask me a question: "Where am I supposed to stand?" My answer: "Anywhere you like."

So where *do* you stand? Do you move right up to the target where you are virtually certain to get all ten darts in the bull's eye? Or do you stand near the far wall of the room to give yourself the greatest challenge possible? If you are like most people, you will do neither of these things. Instead, you will position yourself at whatever distance from the target will give you about a fifty-fifty chance of hitting the bull's eye on each toss. If you are a poor player, you will stand closer than will someone who is an expert. Only people who have lost the attraction to performance challenges that they were born with will choose to stand right next to the target (where they are certain to succeed) or against the far wall (where they cannot be faulted by themselves or others for failing).

The right place to be for maximum motivation is wherever it is that you have a fifty-fifty chance of success.<sup>29</sup> It is the same for teams: A team's performance hurdle must be neither so high as to be beyond members' reach nor so low as to be uninteresting. Recall the words of the climbing team leader: "The afternoon weather up there can get real nasty. Probably we'd have only a fifty-fifty chance of making it. . . ."

The leader's statement helped energize members of the climbing team—but only because the leader knew well the capabilities of this particular group of climbers. For a team composed of novice climbers, reaching the summit of Cloud Peak would have been an impossibility; for a team of world-class climbers, it would have been boring. To set a direction

for a team that has just the right amount of challenge requires that leaders know a great deal about the capabilities of team members. It cannot be done by remote control, by leaders who sit in a headquarters office and dictate objectives to teams in the field whose work and capabilities are not well known to them. Leaders who succeed in establishing just the right amount of challenge for task-performing teams invariably are those who have taken the trouble to get to know their teams well.

### *Leadership versus Followership*

Here are comments made by two different leaders to their work teams.<sup>30</sup> The first is from a leader whose unit was located far from headquarters:

We've got to do what we've got to do to make things work here. I don't know if they'd approve what we're doing back at headquarters or not, and frankly I don't much care. They have no comprehension, zero, of what we face out here, so we have to discount to some extent the things they tell us to do. We have no choice if we want things to go right. We just have to hope that they don't find out things they shouldn't find out, and that they won't get their noses out of joint if they do. But if we do what we need to do, and if we do it well, I know they'll like the results when they finally come in.

The second comment was made by a team leader in a different organization, whose team operated in the same facility as the organization's senior executives:

We got some new marching orders from upstairs last week. [He summarizes the essence of what he has been told.] I don't think this all makes a whole lot of sense, to tell you the truth. But it's what they want us to do, and I guess their job is to tell us what they want and our job is to do it. So let's pitch in and give our best effort and see if we can make this thing work.

These two leaders have fallen off opposite sides of the same log, and neither is dealing very well with the fact that all team leaders are, simultaneously, both leaders *and* followers. The first leader perpetrated a covert

coup: Because the executives at headquarters are unlikely ever to find out what we are doing, let's do what we want. This leader entirely failed to acknowledge both the right of those who have legitimate authority for an organization to set its direction, and the responsibility of those who lead units within that organization to follow that direction. The second leader abdicated his own leadership responsibilities. His words show that he believes his own duties do not extend much beyond delivering the mail, relaying to his teams whatever he has been told. He could hardly have been more perfunctory in passing along the new direction he had received, and the words he used implicitly undermined the legitimate efforts of senior managers to adjust the direction of the overall enterprise.

Because it can be quite difficult for a team leader to chart a reasonable course between the Scylla of the covert coup and the Charybdis of abdication, most readers probably have heard some version of both of these comments in their own organizational experiences. In fact, those who own an enterprise, or act on behalf of the owners, have the *right* to specify collective directions and aspirations—even in organizations that aspire to high member commitment and self-management. It is entirely proper for senior leaders to say, in effect, "This is the mountain we will climb. Not that one, this one. Although many aspects of our collective endeavor are open for discussion, choice of mountain is not among them." And those who lead teams within an organization have a responsibility that extends far beyond merely accepting the direction set by more senior organizational leaders. It also is their job to tailor collective direction so it fits as well as possible with the special circumstances of their own work units, and to call on the full extent of their creativity and ingenuity to make each team's direction as meaningful and engaging as possible.

What, then, is one to do when senior leaders misbehave, when they either promulgate a direction that seems clearly wrongheaded or fail to provide any meaningful direction at all? My observations suggest that the best team leaders temporarily reorient their attention from their own teams to their bosses, seeking—insistently if necessary—whatever clarification they need to be able to provide their teams with direction that is both compelling and well aligned with overall organizational purposes.

As Don Burr repeatedly reminded his managers at People Express Airlines, everyone in an organization is a leader, and everyone is a follower as well. The key to success, he said, was to learn how to be *simultaneously*

both a leader and a follower, to set compelling direction for those you lead even as you are receiving direction from others. Burr was right. But it takes a large measure of skill and personal maturity to do what he said—to balance between one's leader and follower roles, to attend simultaneously both to one's teams and one's bosses, and to resist the temptation either to ignore collective directions or to mindlessly pass them along.

### THE RISKS OF RELEASING ENERGY

Setting direction for work teams is about the exercise of authority and the release of energy. It involves continuously balancing between tapping into forces rooted deep in the human psyche and finding mechanisms for channeling and controlling that energy. It is the organizational manifestation of the Freudian tension between the demands of libidinal drives and the restrictions of civilization. Dealing with authority dynamics and the control of human energies is therefore a dangerous business, as was vividly brought home to me by a participant in an executive seminar a few years ago.

I had been talking with seminar participants about the direction-setting strategies used by individuals who are generally recognized as great leaders. I had described the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., and showed how beautifully he balanced between clarity and incompleteness. Then I quoted from John F. Kennedy's speech about the U.S. space program, and showed that he set a goal that was neither too modest to be engaging nor impossibly difficult to achieve. And then I got a little carried away. "Those of you who read the New Testament," I said, "know that Jesus did not have little team meetings to decide about the goals of the ministry. That surely would have smoothed the sharp edges of his message. Instead, in assembling those who would be his disciples, he simply said, 'Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men'" (Matthew 4:19). The hand of a seminar participant shot up at that point and waved so insistently that it could not be ignored. "Professor, what you're saying is right on; it fits perfectly with my experience in business," the participant said. "But are you aware of the fact that, so far, you have two assassinations and one crucifixion?"

Indeed. We see not just in organizational life but also in political history that to set a clear and engaging direction, and to hold to it, is risky to

the political (and occasionally even the personal) longevity of leaders. Real direction setting is not a casual activity that generates calligraphy on the cafeteria wall, something to be pronounced, approved, and forgotten. Real direction setting, to the contrary, is an organizationally consequential activity that wise leaders enter upon deliberately, thoughtfully, cautiously—and, when they are fully ready, courageously.

Providing direction that energizes, orients, and engages teams is an important ingredient in setting the stage for great performances. But it is not all that is needed, as is illustrated by the Bay of Pigs invasion fiasco planned by the senior team of advisors to President Kennedy. The direction of the Kennedy team was, without question, highly compelling. Yet both the decision the team reached and the implementation of that decision were significantly flawed.<sup>31</sup> The reasons for this failure, perhaps, are rooted not so much in the team's direction as in how it was structured, in the amount and kind of organizational supports it was provided, and in the quality of the coaching it received. We take up these three additional conditions for team effectiveness in the chapters that follow.